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ABSTRACT

This paper considers the question "What are good child outcomes?" from the perspectives of developmental psychology, economics, and sociology. Section 1 of the paper examines good child outcomes as characteristics of stage-salient tasks of development. Section 2 emphasizes the acquisition of "human capital," the development of productive traits such as cognitive ability, educational achievement, practical risk-taking, delayed gratification, and occupational decision-making. This section discusses critical constructs such as delayed gratification, risk tolerance, and career construction. Section 3 deals with social capacity, the ability to interact positively in intimate relationships and demonstrate positive concern and caring in a larger social arena. This section discusses central social relationships and suggests markers of successful development at each stage. Section 4 discusses points of overlap among the three perspectives. Drawing upon the three perspectives, this section suggests that good child outcomes would include the presence of: trust; security; exploration and self-regulation; competent language use; cognitive development and general knowledge; physical well-being and motor development; social problem-solving skills; personal identity; connections with parents and friends; empathy and caring; reading and math skills; the ability to delay gratification; the ability to take practical risks and develop an occupation choice; motivation toward entrepreneurship; the extension of attachments from family members to others; concern for other social groups; and volunteer efforts on behalf of others. The paper concludes by suggesting that identifying positive goals for children with significantly alter the nature of discussions about children and families and have implications for data collection. Contains 91 references. (KB)

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What Are Good Child Outcomes?

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What are Good Child Outcomes?

There is substantial agreement on what constitutes bad child outcomes. People tend to agree that drug use is harmful, that children should not drink, that precocious sex should be delayed, that adolescents should not drop out of school. But what are **good** child outcomes? What do parents and other members of society seek for children? What are good child outcomes for children of differing ages?

In this paper, we address this question from three rather distinct perspectives. First we consider good child outcomes as characteristics of the stage salient tasks of development. Second, we consider good child outcomes as a function of human capital attainment -- the child's acquisition of the knowledge and skills that will make him or her a successful and productive contributor to the economy. Third, we consider social capacity as a measure of good child outcomes -- the presence of empathy for others and behavior that reflects concern for family members, friends, members of the community and the larger society, and for the larger environment as well. The three perspectives are loosely represented by developmental psychology, economics, and sociology. However, it is important to note that some dimensions of good child outcomes are included in two or even all three of these perspectives.

A Developmental Perspective on the Stage-Salient Tasks of Childhood

In this first section, good child outcomes for children themselves are explored, drawing primarily on research conducted by child developmentalists. Legions of researchers studying child development have examined the cognitive, socioemotional and physical health of children

and the factors related to positive outcomes in these domains. However, explicit statements that define an array of good child outcomes are uncommon. Such statements can be implied, however, from the amount of research invested in the study of particular topics, such as close and enduring relationships. Moreover, a number of commissions and working groups have established goals that are often quite explicit with regard to the outcomes seen as desirable for young children.

Childhood: The Pre-School Years

Early childhood development (defined here as occurring from pre-birth until age six) is increasingly being viewed as the time when the building blocks of adult cognitive and emotional functioning are put into place. Evidence of the current, widespread interest in understanding and enhancing early development include the Carnegie Corporation's recent pair of reports ("Starting Points" in 1994 and "Years of Promise" in 1996), the cover article of a recent Time ("How A Child's Brain Develops," February 3, 1997), a current special issue of Newsweek ("You and Your Child," Spring, 1997, the establishment of a National Education Goals Panel and accompanying Goals 2000 legislation (centering on the goal that "by the year 2000 all children will start school ready to learn" National Education Goals Panel, 1993; U.S. Department of Education, 1990), and the President's newly-established Early Childhood Initiative. A theme common to each of these endeavors is the importance of early experiences--especially supportive relationships and intellectual stimulation--for later development.

In light of the rapid growth and changes characterizing childhood and adolescence, H. Werner (1957) and others working in the "organizational" tradition have long argued that these

changes require continual re-organization and re-integration across systems. These reorganizations, in turn, can be viewed as "stage-salient developmental tasks" (Erikson, 1950; Sroufe, 1979; see also Graber & Brooks-Gunn, 1996). Stage salient developmental tasks refer to the dominant developmental issues of the various periods of development. Consistent with other stage theories of development (e.g., Freud, 1926/1929a; Piaget, 1947/1950), a core assumption is that the "negotiation" of each task sets the stage for development in the next period. Scholars differ, however in whether the successful negotiation of a set of developmental tasks is necessary for positive adaptation to the next set of age-relevant tasks.

Stage-salient developmental tasks in the pre-school period have been considered in more detail that those in the elementary and high school periods (Sroufe, 1979; Cicchetti and Cohen, 1995). Because humans are born in such a helpless state and depend on their relationships with their primary caregivers for protection, food, emotional support, and cognitive stimulation, a major stage-salient task of infancy is the development of a supportive relationship with a primary caregiver.

If infants develop supportive relationships with their caregivers they are maximally prepared to use those relationships as a "secure base from which to explore" and learn about the world. The development of curiosity and exploratory skills, thus, as well as balancing

exploration with maintaining a supportive relationship with caregivers, are the key tasks of toddlerhood (Cicchetti and Tucker, 1994).

As children's cognitive skills mature, they begin to exercise (and are expected to exercise) more flexible self regulation of thought, behavior, and emotion. Developing self-control and the flexibility to adjust to the demands and opportunities of different contexts is the key stage-salient task of the preschool and early childhood years. The following tasks, then, need to be addressed during the early years of life:

- trust and security
- curiosity and exploration
- self-regulation
- age-appropriate autonomy (boundaries between self and other)

Developmental processes during the pre-school years prepare the child for a major transition heralding new intellectual and social demands on children: the transition to school. Theoretical and practical considerations of the transition into school, in turn, are frequently subsumed under the rubric of "readiness to learn" (Kagan, 1992; Lewitt & Baker, 1995; Love, Aber, & Brooks-Gunn, 1994; National Education Goals Panel, 1993). The competencies involved in readiness to learn are understood not only to build on stage-salient tasks but also to reflect various contexts of development. Environmental conditions (i.e., supportive and nurturing conditions and/or dangerous or stressful circumstances) can promote or impede the ways in which children negotiate each stage-salient task and the extent of their readiness to learn. As Kagan (1992), has argued, children's readiness to learn is "...predicated on the readiness and support of parents, the media, early care and education services, and the schools" (p. 51). Much less has been written about competencies and positive development for the older child.

Middle Childhood: The Elementary School Years

During the elementary school years, the child builds on the competencies of the preschool period. The major stage-salient tasks of late childhood include the following (see Baroody et al. 1984; Sroufe, 1993; Hartup, 1990; Mascel et al, 1989; Brooks-Gunn et al, 1995; Hartup, 1989, Collins and Gunnar, 1990, Collins, 1984; Sroufe et al, 1992; Gardner, 1983):

- the development of competency in mathematics and reading,
- the ability to engage in unstructured learning,
- the development of interpersonal social problem-solving skills
- engagement in activities outside of the family
- increased self-regulatory behavior, now evident in relationships with peers and teachers
- development of artistic, body-kinesthetic, musical competencies

Adolescence

The national initiative *Healthy People 2000* (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 1991) spurred a serious discussion as to how our nation's youth might be helped to navigate the transition from adolescence to adulthood without engaging in unhealthy and risky behaviors. Not all youth are successful; some adolescents die from violence, drug and alcohol use and abuse, motor vehicle accidents, unsafe sex, and poor nutrition (National Research Council, 1995; U.S. Congress, 1991; Interagency Forum on Child and Family Statistics, 1997). Seventy-five percent of adolescent deaths are caused by injuries, homicide, and suicide. The consequences of substance use, injuries and disabilities related to motor and recreational

vehicles, repercussions of unprotected sexual activity, mental disorders, chronic illness and eating disorders account for significant sources of adolescent morbidity (Millstein, Peterson & Nightingale, 1993). Engagement in risky behaviors -- (I) drug and alcohol use and tobacco

addiction, (ii) unprotected sexual intercourse, (iii) juvenile delinquency, and (iv) chronic school truancy and underachievement -- can undermine health and limit adolescents life chances.

A promising but distinct framework that is complementary to a focus on problematic development is research on how adolescents develop in healthy ways and how competency may be developed. Within this framework, resilience and competency building are central components to helping youth, and navigating adolescence in healthy ways is best viewed as a continuous process, with earlier life experiences shaping later outcomes (Werner and Smith, 1992; Werner, 1995; Luther and Zigler, 1991; Haggarty et al., 1994). Youth development programs are often inspired by this perspective (Roth, Brooks-Gunn, Murray & Foster, 1997).

Within both frameworks, researchers have investigated which events cause adolescents to follow different pathways, and what factors can alter the trajectory of both healthy and risky behaviors. Researchers wishing to understand both successful and unsuccessful transitions in and out of adolescence have investigated how risk and protective factors interact to facilitate or hinder healthy adolescent development (e.g., Werner, 1990; Brooks-Gunn & Paikoff, 1993). Promoting healthy lives requires more than focusing on problem behaviors individually. For example, researchers recognize the co-occurrence of health-compromising behaviors and discuss risky lifestyles (Jessor, 1993; Petersen, Compas, Brooks-Gunn, Stemmler, Ely & Grant, 1993). Competencies may be addressed rather than just problem behaviors (Graber, Brooks-Gunn & Petersen, 1996; Lerner, 1995; Garmezy & Masten, 1991).

The transition into adolescence is marked by dramatic changes in physiology (with the accompanying changes in the way the body looks; Brooks-Gunn, & Reiter, 1990), alterations in emotions (increases in both aggressive/externalizing and depressive/internalizing feelings and behavior; Petersen, Compas, Brooks-Gunn et al; 1993), and changes in relationships (primarily with the meaning of peers in the youth's life; Brown, 1990; Brooks-Gunn and Paikoff, 1993). Additionally, reasoning abilities and the use of abstract thought increase (Keating, 1990). At the same time that these changes are occurring, the young adolescent experiences a major shift in the school context. The transition to middle school usually heralds larger classes, less contact with teachers (and therefore less opportunity for close relationships with teachers), moving to different classrooms each day, and less sustained contact with a small group of peers within a classroom (Eccles and Midgley, 1990).

Stage-salient tasks of early adolescence include (see Steinberg, 1990; Entwistle, 1990; Harter, 1990; Chase-Lansdale et al, 1995):

- development of (or refinement of) personal identity
- maintaining a connect with parents while at the same time developing more sustained friendships
- acceptance of limits on activities (parental supervision) while at the same time expanding time spent without parental supervision
- development of routines in the absence of continual adult supervision
- realistic assessment of competencies
- empathy and caring for others

Parallel developments have occurred in the prevention and intervention field. Not only are program designers recognizing the interrelationships among problems, but there is a growing awareness of the importance of focusing on competency-building (Benson, 1993; Pittman & Cahill, 1991).

Another dimension worth exploring pertains to the development of honesty and integrity. Developmental psychologists have approached this dimension within the framework of research on moral development and moral reasoning (see Kohlberg, 1976). Surprisingly, a search of recent documents on promoting positive adolescent development failed to uncover any discussion of honesty, either as an asset promoting positive development or as a goal of healthy development (but see Search Institute, 1996). However, due to the importance of honesty as a foundation for other aspects of social capacity, it may warrant further research as an indicator of good child outcomes.

Competency building is a central feature of what has been termed *positive youth development*, or the desired outcomes for our nation's youth. Realizing that consensus on what constitutes desired outcomes is difficult, they usually include health, happiness and productivity. It recognizes that preventing problem behaviors is not all that is needed to prepare youth for their future -- that "problem free is not fully prepared"(Pittman, 1991).

Youth development program developers have turned to research on youth assets and competencies for guidance in how programs can enhance adolescents' chances for positive development. For example, the Search Institute delineates 30 developmental assets (16 external and 14 internal) that youth need for positive developmental outcomes, defined as engagement in prosocial behaviors and avoidance of health compromising and future-jeopardizing behaviors (Benson, 1993). The 16 external assets envelop youth with familial and extra-familial networks that provide care, support, control, and structured time use. The 14 internal assets serve to nurture, within youth, positive commitments, values and social competencies.

A parallel endeavor by the Center for Youth Development and Policy Research has addressed the fundamental question of what day-to-day experiences are essential for a young person to pass successfully through adolescence into young adulthood, allowing the young person to acquire desirable positive behaviors, attitudes, and skills (Zeldin, 1995). Their answer, based on evidence from the work of numerous research roundtables, a review of 12 youth-focused task forces and synthesis reports, and review of more than 200 research studies (see Zeldin, Kimball & Price, 1995 for an annotated bibliography), is simple: Young people need access to safe places, challenging experiences, and caring people on a daily basis.

A Human Capital Perspective

Economists have taken a quite different but complementary perspective on positive development, emphasizing the acquisition of "human capital" as a good outcome. Human capital (Becker, 1975) embodies the development of productive traits such as cognitive ability, educational achievement, skill acquisition, and job experience. This perspective echoes the focus of the developmental perspective on school achievement, cognition and language; however, other elements of well-being felt to be central to productivity are developed, including practical risk-taking, delayed gratification, and occupational decision-making. The payoff to human capital frequently has been measured by earned income and a useful measure of the value of human capital has been the wage rate, which can be approximated as earned income divided by hours worked.

A generation of economists have examined the formal processes by which human capital is accumulated. One research focus has been on schooling and cognitive attainments. Educational achievement measured by years of schooling, types of degrees earned, and mastery of basic academic skills has consumed much attention. Interruption of educational skill accumulation has also been a critical focus of research. A parallel body of research has arisen regarding the labor force experience of people as they develop job skills, work experience and build economic careers. Similarly, interruption in labor force processes and social factors preventing the accumulation or expression of labor skills have drawn much attention.

- Human capital is measured by the wage rate, educational achievement and job experience.

The result of all of this work is that the measurement of positive economic outcomes is well understood using the human capital construct. However, we are usually forced to wait until late adolescence or young adulthood to gain an accurate valuation of human capital. We must wait to observe how much formal education and labor force experience is acquired by individuals and wait until market processes value their stocks of human capital. Are there ways to assess whether the process of acquiring human capital is proceeding successfully among young children and adolescents?

At present, we learn about the process of human capital accumulation in early ages in very limited ways. Typically, we measure IQ, reading and mathematics skill accumulation as positive indices of positive human capital accumulation. There is much more attention to how the development of human capital is impeded. Negative indications of human capital

accumulation are measured by interruptions of formal schooling or job experience and self-destructive behavior.

- Positive indications of human capital accumulation are skills in reading and mathematics.

Not much research evidence has surfaced relating positive early childhood constructs with human capital accumulation later in life. There has been quite a bit of research linking the social and family context of children to human capital development, but individual level research expressly relating positive individual level development to later life human capital attainment is lacking. Rather, it is largely assumed that development of positive aspects of human development must somehow contribute to human capital development. Is this true? Consider the example of the role of close and enduring relationships. Tremendous effort has been directed toward understanding how children attach to their mothers and fathers and how modern child care arrangements may influence attachment. Why should an economist care about attachment in infants? Children's close and enduring relationships and the feelings of trust and security that they provide may be a behavioral "glue" that helps people assemble the components of human capital and, then again, it may not. The point is that, trust and security in relationships, while important for subsequent social well-being, may also be associated with human capital formation. This problem defines a general gap between developmental psychology and economics and suggests a major research frontier.

- Research is needed that examines how the process of social development contributes to the production of human capital. These measures of social development would represent markers of good child outcomes over the life cycle.

Considerable attention has been directed to the nexus of the environmental context to human capital formation. Family, peer group and neighborhood constructs map rather well to

human capital development in children and young adults. For example, at the family level, both family structure and economic status usually surface as important. Two-parent versus single parent families and families comfortably above poverty versus those decidedly below the poverty line are usually associated with human capital development in children (Duncan et al,; Mclanahan, 1988). Similarly, characteristics of the peer group (Resnick, 1997) and neighborhood seem to correspond with positive developmental markers and increased educational achievement. However, our knowledge of how the social context translates through developmental processes to produce human capital is very limited. It is possible that there is an organizational construct that is important in determining how efficiently families, social networks and communities create human capital and enable its expression in market processes (Ben-Porah, 1980; Becker, 1975; Coleman, 1988). Researchers often refer to this organizational factor as social or cultural capital although we are very deficient in measuring it directly.

- Family, peer and neighborhood influences on human capital formation are an important focus for research. When important influences are identified, they would represent markers of good child outcomes later in life.

Traditionally, human capital has been regarded as an asset, i.e., a capital stock. Its valuation is expressed in a return to its owner through market processes which, in turn, are qualified by imperfections in the market such as discrimination, the availability of information and "luck", as well as individual level factors such as genetic endowments, tastes, and other factors that contribute to the motivation to utilize human capital efficiently in a market context. The effective utilization of human capital also depends on how well it is combined with other assets such as physical and social capital. The result depends both on the levels of complementary stocks of capital and on how creatively these assets are used in a risky economic

environment. Until recently, the social and individual level factors mentioned above were thought to be outside of economic analysis. Gary Becker (Becker, 1996) has challenged economists to lift the lid on the human capital construct and examine its mechanism of action as it is created at the individual level and expressed to society at the family and community level. This is an opportune time for economists and other behavioral and social scientists to collaborate in discovering the origins and context of productive behavior. New questions emerge as one considers the origin and expression of human capital accumulation. For instance, why do economic actors accumulate capital? This behavior requires that the actor take the long view of time, foregoing immediate consumption in favor of the accumulation of productive capacity in the future. This behavior also requires the person to grow comfortable with taking risks and grow wise in managing risk. Other questions also avail research attention. For example, there is the complicated question of how young people choose an occupation and assemble the foundation upon which a career can be constructed. A very special piece of the occupational choice question involves entrepreneurial ability and the motivation to be a self-employed capitalist. To examine these new dimensions, researchers will require the development of new measurement strategies.

One critical construct where the discipline of development and economics coincide is that of delayed gratification and time preferences (Flavell, 1985; Gardner, 1985; Mulligan, 1996; Mulligan and Becker, 1994).

From an economist's perspective, the question of time preferences revolves around the economic concept of discounting. Discounting is a simple construct that tells us how individuals view the tradeoff between present consumption and future reward. If an individual discounts the

future at a rapid rate, then he or she will be unwilling to put off present consumption for a future reward unless the amount of the reward is very large. The higher the individual discounts the future, the larger the future reward must be to induce the individual forego present consumption to invest in the future. Individuals who discount the future live for the moment, are less likely to invest in their future, and are more likely to engage in careless risk management in their personal lives. Developmental researchers have conducted numerous studies of the circumstances under which children will delay gratification (Funder, Block, J.H., and Block, J., 1983; Mischel et al, 1989). Extending such studies into examinations of time preferences among adolescents and youth may enrich our understanding of how childhood experiences and circumstances lead to a willingness to invest for the future and take acceptable risks or costs in the present to achieve gains in the future. Thus, delayed gratification among children and youth would seem to be a useful construct to measure because human capital formation is an investment that requires a very patient approach with regard to time management and because human capital is subject to sudden and drastic depreciation if the individual is careless about their health and personal safety.

- Understanding children's ability to delay gratification and to perceive a relatively long time horizon would be useful in elucidating why individuals invest in themselves. A capability to delay gratification represents a good child outcome from this perspective.

How would one measure time horizons or preferences? Could you simply ask a respondent, especially an adolescent or youth? As with most preferences, it is difficult to just ask a respondent to assess their most intimate tendencies and this is especially a problem with measuring preferences in children. A better approach is to observe how individuals make choices regarding time tradeoffs. However, this approach is inconvenient because the time

tradeoffs span many years. Perhaps, a set of simulated choices could be constructed to develop a sense of time tradeoffs in regard to investment choices such as human capital accumulation. It is unclear whether there is a satisfactory developmental construct to measure the development of time preferences and whether there are developmental antecedents to the creation of time preferences. It is also unclear to what extent preferences are innate versus developed through environmental influences.

The tolerance and management of risk is another new dimension to explore as part of economic behavior that is very relevant to creating and using an asset such as human capital. Risk taking is essential to economic behavior. If there is no risk, then there is no reward. Risk taking can also be enjoyable. High risk behavior is often a euphemism for engaging in highly pleasurable behavior such as sex, drugs and physical experiences that endanger the person. Traditionally, social research has tended to explore the incidence and prevalence of the negative types of risk taking and to dwell on parental and societal strategies for constraining the behavior. Controlling the behavior is the remedy for solving the problem. Perhaps it is time to view risk taking in a positive light and begin to document how children develop the notion that they must engage a risky world and master techniques for managing risks to achieve an optimum gain (Young, 1991).

How do children develop a sense of practical risk-taking? To what extent is risk-taking driven and constrained by biological forces? How can we measure a successful set of risk-taking behaviors? Perhaps, a place to start is to examine how individuals develop a sense of reward relative to risk. The measurement problem centers on assessing the probabilities for success and failure which in turn govern the reward/risk. An entrepreneur must forage for opportunity and

develop a sense of the probability for success and failure experimentally in the marketplace. In other words, the individual must become comfortable with the notion that the economic world is dynamic and that there is profit in exploring the changing economic landscape for profitable opportunities. How do individuals learn to explore their economic environments, calculate the probabilities for success and failure "on the fly" and learn strategies for optimizing profit in the face of uncertainty? This requires a thorough search for information, more than what one would do in a literature review for a research paper. It requires gathering information by experimenting with the market, and it requires a willingness to engage the economic world in the face of uncertainty. It also requires developing a disengagement strategy in order to minimize losses should they occur. It would seem that these skills require allowing children the freedom to explore and take risks. Further, there should be instruction in assessing an experimental exploration by means of direct interaction or example. It might very well be that fathers traditionally have been instrumental in these developmental processes and that data collection should pay more attention to how parents, perhaps particularly fathers, develop the capacity for practical risk-taking in their children.

- Practical risk-taking may be an important antecedent to acquiring and utilizing human capital and according a marker of positive development.

Career construction is a useful yet complicated idea which envelops the process of human capital formation. Human capital formation is a substantial building block in establishing a career. Success in establishing an economic career involves using the productive assets in one's family, peer group and community, in addition to an individual's human capital. Coleman (Coleman, 1988) observes that social capital in the family and community is a very productive

asset that contributes to the formation and expression of human capital. Two very recent studies (Oppenheimer, 1997; Smock, 1997) observe that career construction is very important in establishing marriages, and marriages are important sources of social capital within families. Occupational choice is another important ingredient in career construction which interacts with human capital formulation because it motivates the individual to acquire human capital in a definite pattern and it conditions the payoff to human capital accumulation. One very important, yet relatively uncharted, occupational choice is the decision to be a self-employed capitalist. This is the purest form of the entrepreneurial spirit and is very powerful in our economy. Assembling a portfolio of human and social capital and constructing a strategy for putting these assets into action so that an individual begins to accumulate wealth across the life course is the objective in this form of career construction.

- The process of constructing a career or occupational choice may interact with the process of developing human capital, being both an important building block and a source of motivation for the development of human capital.

Measurement of career construction would require a valuation of human and social capital formation and accumulation over time. It would account for occupational choice and its antecedent behaviors. Moreover, it would develop a sense of whether a process of accumulation is started. It is much easier to observe deficits in career construction. It may well be the case that the youth of today are experiencing increasing difficulty in establishing a successful career, and this may lead in turn to difficulty in establishing families and permanent, independent households. Social turbulence undermines successful career construction and is related to a wide variety of problems for the individual (Coleman, 1990; Mclanahan, 1988; Wu and Martinson, 1993). To date, we have had more success in measuring turbulence and the chaos that results

from it than in measuring career construction and the positive accumulation of economic and social wealth that arises from it. However, attention to measuring the positive aspects of this construct and the developmental processes that contribute to it may yield a more comprehensive view of human development.

This leads to an interesting developmental question. How do children develop a sense of career construction? Children are frequently asked "what do you want to be when you grow up?". Their answers are usually less than definitive. Is it possible to understand how they develop ideas about their careers and strategies for implementing them? Certainly, we know how to measure parental aspirations about their educational and economic outcomes for their children, and we are able to measure expectations on the part of children concerning their transition to adulthood. Could it be that something is missing? Perhaps the answer is found in the example set by parents, peers and community adults? Maybe there are developmental processes in very early stages of development that are as yet unappreciated in their contribution to career construction.

The best strategy for solving these puzzles must be that developmental, social and economic processes must be monitored together throughout the life course and focused on the processes of wealth building in both the economic and social dimensions of an individual's life.

Social Capacity

Humans are social animals. Throughout the world and throughout history, most humans have lived in family groups, and family groups in turn tend to aggregate into neighborhoods and/or communities. Indeed, the social nature of humans is so strong that one of the most severe punishments meted out to people is solitary confinement. Similarly, the people who describe

themselves as most happy are those whose interpersonal relationships are rich and positive (Waite, 1995).

Given the social nature of humans, one characteristic of a successful human is the capacity to live and work with other people. *Social capacity* is viewed here as a valuable adult characteristic involving the ability not only to interact positively within intimate relationships but also the ability to demonstrate positive concern and caring in a larger social arena.

Relationships with others begin with family relationships, where intense and enduring bonds link people together for reasons of survival as well as growth and companionship. Over time, social relationships extend to include relationships with age peers and colleagues in school or work, to neighbors, and to associates in voluntary organizations such as churches and sports teams. Ultimately they include the capacity to care about and interact with strangers, including persons from different social groups and persons whose goals and needs are different or even in conflict with one's own. Indeed, a person with a highly developed social capacity is likely to extend their concern to animals, plants, and/or the inanimate environment as well as to human beings.

Since the focus of this paper is on children, we concentrate on the social relationships most central to the developing child through the years of infancy, childhood and adolescence.

Early Childhood: The Preschool Years

Social relationships form first with family members. The newborn is completely dependent on the care of others, generally his or her biological parents. This physical and emotional dependence on older humans reflects and/or leads the infant to an interest in other humans. By the end of a child's first year, a child not only knows but is generally firmly attached

to his or her parents. The lack of such an attachment is one of the primary markers of poor development among very young children, while the presence of early attachment provides an early marker of positive social development.

- A marker of successful development among very young children are strong and positive relationships to a parent or other caregiver. If siblings are present, relationships with siblings provide an early opportunity to expand beyond relationships with parents or parent figures to include persons who are generally fairly close in age to the child.

Under optimal conditions, social competence expands rapidly during the pre-school years. Children gradually learn that other people are separate and distinct. They learn that others can be hurt both physically and emotionally and that others can be made happy and comfortable. Typically they learn to take pleasure in the happiness of others, and they learn that making others happy is related to increased well-being for the self. This occurs both because others respond to being given respect or consideration in tangible positive ways and also because children gradually come to obtain intrinsic pleasure in the pleasure of others. Thus, social relationships outside the family expand rapidly during the pre-school years. Young children quickly enlarge their social horizons to include other children to whom they are exposed, for example, siblings, other relatives, neighbors, and other children who share a child care arrangement. Well before kindergarten entry, researchers are able to observe important differences in children's social skills and success in social relationships (Dunn, 1988).

Research suggests that for young children in day care, positive peer relations can be associated with greater levels of own well-being (e.g., lower levels of cortisol) (Tout, Deltaan, Kipp Campbell, and Gunnar, forthcoming). More importantly for social capacity, children who like other children, who play cooperatively, who share toys, and who include others in their

games are contributing to the well-being of the other children in their environment and are manifesting early signs of social capacity.

There is considerable agreement that positive development among pre-schoolers encompasses an interest in helping others attain physical and emotional well-being (Aber and Jones, forthcoming). The reasons for this are a topic of debate, but as noted by Rowe and Teachman (1997), many genotypes reflect an interaction between genetic dispositions and social experiences. The development of social capacity during childhood seems like a critical instance of such interaction, and markers of such capacity represent indicators of good child outcomes during childhood.

The overt measurable manifestations among pre-schoolers of a positive concern for others includes two aspects, that is, the presence of certain types of behaviors and the absence of other types of behaviors. Specifically, minimal amounts of hitting, fighting, pushing, biting, and taking things can be seen as positive. Similarly, greater and increasing amounts of empathy, sharing, cooperation, and caregiving can be seen as positive. The presence or absence of such behaviors can be assessed in a variety of ways. They can be reported by parents or caregivers or teachers. Alternatively, they can be videotaped or directly observed by trained raters in the home, a day care center or pre-school.

- A marker of successful social development among pre-schoolers is the presence of positive behaviors such as cooperation and the minimal occurrence of aggressive behaviors.

Research is suggesting that children who are chosen as friends, even at very young ages, are more successful later in life, and not only in social domains. They are also more likely to be personally well-adjusted and to achieve in school (Ladd, 1990; Ladd, Kochenderfer, and

Coleman, 1996). Thus, for pre-schoolers, having friends, being chosen as a friend or playmate, and not being rejected by children of the same age seem to be early indicators of positive development (Parker and Asher, 1987).

- Another marker of successful social development during the pre-school years is having friends and being chosen as a friend.

Middle Childhood: The Elementary School Years

School-age pre-adolescent children may be defined as children approximately aged 6 to 11. During these years, relationships with family members remain central, but children increasingly develop relationships with non-family members in school, on sports teams, at religious activities, and in organizations such as Scouts.

The sheer number of friends or activities with age peers is often viewed as a marker of children's social success; but this seems to be a superficial indicator. Social capacity can be present even if only a limited number of strong relationships exist, if the child's relationships extend across at least several social groupings. Thus, a child who is firmly attached to family members but unable to relate to people outside of the family would not be fully developing his or her social capacity because, as posited above, successful adult development implies the capacity to feel concern and caring for a range of people that extends beyond the immediate family. However, a young child with strong family bonds and several good friends at school would be seen as developing well. In other words, social capacity is not a surrogate for popularity. Indeed, the focus is strongly on what a child provides to others, not on what the child obtains from others.

As with pre-school children, the components of social capacity among school-age children include both empathy and action. School-age pre-adolescents, in general, have a greater capacity than pre-schoolers to understand the needs and feelings of others. With increasing age, children are also increasingly capable of developing their own solutions to challenging social situations.

- During the school years, a marker of successful development is increasing empathy for other children and behavior that reflects that awareness by minimizing negative behavior toward other children and increasing positive behavior toward other children.

Over the years of childhood, many children have experiences in groups outside their usual social environment. For example, they may go to summer camp, play at a neighborhood park, or have a part in a musical production. In some cases, these experiences may introduce children to broader social groupings. During middle childhood, breadth may simply constitute friendships with children of the opposite gender or a chance to interact with cousins who live in a different town; but, as they become older, children will increasingly have opportunities to interact with children from other social groups. Whoever they are -- minority children, white children, immigrant children, farm children, suburban children, healthy children, only children -- the presence of social capacity implies an ability to extend concern and action on behalf of persons who belong to other social groups.

- A marker of social capacity during childhood is the ability to feel concern for other social groups and to behave in ways that are not hurtful to others and which may benefit others.

Social capacity cannot be limited to interactions with humans. During childhood, animals such as pets represent another important focus for social development. As with humans, understanding is needed that, in their way, animals experience pain and pleasure and people can

contribute to the positive and negative feelings of animals. Thus, children can be expected to avoid cruelty and neglect to animals, while showing positive behavior toward animals with increasing consistency.

Adolescence

Moving through the adolescent years, approximately ages 12 - 17, adolescents develop formal operational thinking (Piaget, 1947/1950, 1971, 1983), and their capacity to reason abstractly expands substantially. This provides a greater ability to take on the role of another and imagine what it is like to be another person or group of persons. To the extent that adolescents focus their expanding capacities on other people, and not just on themselves, their social capacity may increase substantially during the years of adolescence. In addition, the increasing competence and independence of adolescents provides opportunities for greater action on behalf of others. However, an increase in social capacity is not assured. Countervailing pressure from the individual's own needs for acceptance may increase at the same time. Also, as teens become bigger and are less closely supervised, their capacity to engage in hurtful behavior is increasing. Moreover, a lack of energy to act on an awareness of others, particularly in the face of peer pressure to focus on other issues (e.g., clothing and media), and even a potential to act against the interests of others, may make gains in social capacity during adolescence a real challenge.

Even among adolescents, feelings of empathy and the associated social behaviors seem most likely to be manifest within the family. The family represents the inner circle of relationships, and most adolescents remain close to their parents (National Commission on Children, 1991). Less is known about sibling relationships during adolescence, especially using

data from representative samples; however, on an anecdotal level the closeness of many siblings and their willingness to take action on behalf of one another is widely appreciated.

The adolescent friendship group or peer network has received considerable attention, though the focus of research and discussion tends to be on how other adolescents affect a particular adolescent's values and behavior, rather than on adolescent empathy for others and their actions on behalf of others. Nevertheless, after family, friends proffer a likely locus for the manifestation of social capacity.

Expanding a sense of social capacity beyond friends and family to the larger community and to people who are strangers to the adolescent represents a more difficult and, we suggest, a less likely development. As adolescents become older, though, opportunities for such development increasingly occur. Schools become larger and, for many youth, more diverse, and adolescents may be exposed to new types of persons during their school day. Participation in sports and other activities may also expand students' horizons.

If children mature positively, they become increasingly able to comprehend that strangers, people they do not know and may never meet, are real and have sorrows and joys like their own. This comprehension is intellectual as well as emotional, and it requires a degree of cognitive maturation that is not present among young children but which generally develops during the teen years. It involves an appreciation of strangers not only individuals, but as groups of people. Even for adults, the pain or joy of an individual tends to be easier to comprehend than the circumstances of a group. For example, a person struck by disaster can seem very real and personal, and many people may feel real empathy for the person. An understanding of endemic suffering by a class of people is harder to grasp and develops later in life.

As children mature, they also become better able to grasp complex issues such as protecting the environment and the humane treatment of animals. What are adolescents' cognitions and feelings regarding the environment or animals? This is a rather abstract form of social capacity, in that it implies a concern about other species and future generations of humans. Nevertheless, it is suggested that the presence of such concern represents a good child outcome.

Little is known regarding the mental, emotional and behavioral involvement of adolescents. Although, the development of caring and civic responsibility in youth is gaining attention (Chase-Lansdale, Wakschlag and Brooks-Gunn, 1995), and scattered questions presumably exist in polls; surveys such as "Monitoring the Future" and regional studies, minimal research has been conducted describing or analyzing social capacity among adolescents as relationships move beyond the peer group into the local community or the larger community. This makes it difficult at present to document the depth or breadth of social capacity among adolescents using representative data.

Indicators of social capacity among adolescents again include both cognitive and behavioral components. Cognitions that recognize the legitimacy or value of other persons, including strangers and future generations, provide evidence of the existence of social capacity. Similarly, an expanding awareness of the needs of animals and plants and the larger physical environment signals an advancing sense of social capacity.

This paper takes no stance in defining specific behaviors as measures of social capacity. A person may be led to volunteer as a mentor in a program for disadvantaged children or may run for office on a platform opposed to progressive taxation. They may initiate a social movement or they may pray for a better world. They may work to improve the environment in

the future, or they may hand money to a hungry homeless person. It is not the specific action that a person takes, but the existence of a social capacity that takes account of the importance of other and even unknown people that distinguishes a successful social human. Indicators of such a capacity may, then, vary widely, ranging from involvement in organizations to individual actions, and from concrete measurable behaviors like giving time or money to unobserved behaviors such as prayer and worry.

- Markers of social relationships with strangers need to be varied, ranging from giving time, energy, money and goods to other persons or groups. Time and energy may be active or passive. Volunteering, recycling, counseling others, prayer on behalf of others, writing letters, and donations of money or goods would all be appropriate manifestations and would comprise behavioral indicators of social capacity.

The investment of time, money and emotional energy in such concerns may or may not diminish the resources available for investment in financial capital or human capital. It may or may not undermine an individual's personal happiness or pleasure. The effect that social relationships of this type have on other domains of success is not its defining characteristic. Rather it is defined by the person's investment of his or her own resources in the well-being of strangers. Given rapid cognitive and social development occurring during the years from eleven to seventeen, attention to developing age-appropriate markers is necessary.

Discussion and Conclusions

Our point of departure for this paper was agreement that American society, and the research community as well, are overly focussed on documenting and discussing the negative behaviors of children and adolescents. Our goal was to explore positive outcomes for children from the differing vantage points of several distinctive disciplinary perspectives, specifically, a child development perspective, a human capital perspective, and a more sociological viewpoint

that emphasizes social interactions. Our purpose was not to pit these perspectives against one another but to draw upon several research traditions to develop a broader sense of the outcomes that might be desirable for children. Doing so suggests points of disciplinary overlap as well as distinct differences.

For example, child development researchers and sociologists alike emphasize the value of strong social relationships. Also, both child developmentalists and economists emphasize cognitive attainment. On the other hand, the economic viewpoint takes a somewhat uncommon stance in suggesting that practical risk taking might be encouraged for children, who will grow up to welcome entrepreneurial challenges. Also, social capacity as an building block for a civil and enduring social order has received less research attention among economists and many developmental researchers than the development of the individual. Finally, none of these perspectives makes physical health or biological competence a central component of child outcomes, although these are elements of school readiness and general development.

Drawing upon the several disciplines represented among the authors, a listing of good child outcomes would be wide-ranging. It would include the presence of trust, security, exploration and self-regulation, competent language use, cognitive development and general knowledge, physical well-being and motor development, social problem-solving skills, personal identity, connections with parents and relationships with friends, empathy and caring, skills in reading and math, the ability to delay gratification, the ability to take practical risks and develop an occupational choice, being motivated toward entrepreneurship over the life course, the extension of strong attachments to parents, siblings, and other family members to non-family

members, cooperative behaviors and concern for other social groups, and volunteering time, energy, money or goods on behalf of other persons and animals and the inanimate environment.

This rather extensive list leads to the question whether all children need to have all virtues. We suggest that this question should not be answered with a "yes" or a "no" but that these characteristics should be present to some degree, but a varying degree, in all children. One of the needs of society is for a varied population with different skills and interests to solve different kinds of problems and to make life rich in varied ways. Yet, the good outcomes noted above are generally quite fundamental characteristics, and we would argue that in general most children should have most of these characteristics to some degree. Consider, for example, curiosity and exploration. Even if curiosity and exploration are valued and encouraged for all children, they will manifest themselves in a myriad of forms across a population. The curiosity of some children will lead them to become artists, while others will be drawn into the sciences, and still others will want to create their own enterprises.

We do not consider the present list of good child outcomes to be an exhaustive list. Our goal has been to raise a different kind of question than is usually asked and to intentionally pursue it from the perspectives of multiple disciplines. As society seeks to identify ways to improve the development and well-being of children, we suggest that it will be fruitful to expend considerable energy identifying the goals we have for children. Moving beyond discussions of the behaviors that adults want to squelch in children to consideration of a broad set of characteristics that are desired for children will, we suggest, significantly alter the nature of our discussions of children and families.

Finally, a critical implication of this perspective is the breadth it implies for data collection. Not only do a wide-ranging set of child outcomes need to be examined, but they need to be examined as they unfold over the years of childhood. Moreover, some outcomes will not be manifest during childhood, but need to be examined among youth and young adults. Also, understanding the antecedents of such good outcomes requires similar breadth in the set of variables examined as the antecedents of good child outcomes. Demanding as this suggests the task may be, this perspective should eventually produce a richer and more complete understanding of human development.

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